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"THE IRON HAND"

A New One-Act

WAR DRAMA

—BY—

HALL CAINE

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CHARACTERS:

A GERMAN CAPTAIN.
A GERMAN LIEUTENANT.
A GERMAN SERGEANT.
THE BARONESS LAMBOTTE.
NADINE LAMBOTTE.
VICTOR LAMBOTTE, A BELGIAN LIEUTENANT.
PRIVATE JONNIAUX, A BELGIAN SOLDIER.
FATHER LIEBBRECHT, A BELGIAN PRIEST.
CORPORAL, GUARD, etc.

SCENE—*The Chateau Lambotte on the River Yser, somewhere between Furnes and Dixmude.*

TIME—*At the beginning of the war.*

A room of dignified, well appointed [illegible] for a chateau. Large windows right and left of it. Door at right (of actors to the house), up stage. A staircase leading down to room under the stage open from right to left. Armor, etc., the home of a soldierly family.

There are four large oil pictures on walls. On right wall, above staircase, a portrait of Leopold I., the first King of the Belgians. On left wall, a portrait of King Albert, the present monarch. At back on R, between door and window, a portrait of an elderly man in the uniform of a Belgian general. At left, in corresponding position, a portrait of a young Belgian lieutenant. Against R wall, near to footlights, stands a large upright clock, and immediately above it there is a large round brass electric bell.

It is night. Curtains drawn over windows. German Captain stands at back of a heavy hall table on left, under the portrait of King Albert. By his side sits his lieutenant, with pens, paper, etc. There is a telephone receiver on the table. A sergeant, a corporal and two privates stand at door.

On R of stage, by the staircase to room below, stand two gentlewomen, one elderly, in widow's weeds; the other young, and an old priest.

CAPTAIN—Sergeant!

SERGEANT *(stepping forward and saluting)*—Captain!

CAPTAIN—Make a general search of the chateau, examine the servants and take observation of any telephone or wireless apparatus there may be about the house.

SERGEANT—Yes, Captain.

(He goes in by door on right, accompanied by one of the two privates).

CAPTAIN *(sitting, to group on right)*—And now, if you please.

CORPORAL *(sharply)*—Achtung! Vorwarts!

(The two ladies and the priest approach table—the old lady fearlessly, the younger one nervously, the priest with composure).

CAPTAIN *(to old lady)*—Your name, madame?

OLD LADY *(with quiet dignity)*—The Baroness Lambotte.

CAPTAIN *(repeating to lieutenant, who writes answers)*—Baroness Lambotte. Widow?

BARONEE—As you see.

CAPTAIN—Your late husband's name?

BARONESS—General the Baron Lambotte.

CAPTAIN—Long dead?

BARONESS—He died at Liege, fighting against the invaders of Belgium.

CAPTAIN *(with a shrug)*—H'm! any family?

BARONEE—A son.

CAPTAIN—His name?

BARONESS—Victor Lambotte.

CAPTAIN *(repeating as before)*—Victor Lambotte. Also a soldier?

BARONESS *(proudly)*—A lieutenant in the army of the King.

CAPTAIN—Where is he now?

BARONESS—I don't know.

CAPTAIN—If you did you wouldn't tell me?

BARONESS *(with quiet emphasis)*—I should not.

CAPTAIN *(to younger lady)*—Mademoiselle, your name, please?

YOUNG LADY *(nervously)*—Nadine Lambotte, sir.

CAPTAIN—Daughter of the Baroness?

NADINE—Daughter-in-law, sir.

CAPTAIN—Then your husband is the lieutenant in the Belgian army?

NADINE—Yes, sir. *(Pointing to portrait on left)*—That is his portrait, sir.

BARONESS *(seizing her hand, in a whisper)*—Nadine!

NADINE *(frightened)*—What have I said?

CAPTAIN *(after glancing at picture, to priest)*—And now, *your* name, Reverend Father?

PRIEST—Father Libbrecht.

CAPTAIN—Cure of the parish?

FATHER L. *(bowing)*—And chaplain at the Chateau Lambotte.

CAPTAIN—Long here?

FATHER L.—Nearly thirty years.

CAPTAIN—Then you are perfectly acquainted both with this house and the country surrounding it?

FATHER L.—Perfectly.

CAPTAIN—That will do for the present. *(The three fall back. The sergeant returns by staircase from below).* Well?

SERGEANT—I have searched the house, sir. There is no wireless apparatus anywhere, and no telephone except the one on your table.

CAPTAIN—And the servants?

SERGEANT—We have seen them together and shut them up in the room below.

(A murmur of voices comes from beneath stage).

CAPTAIN—Good! *(To the ladies and the priest)*—You are at liberty to go back to your rooms and to move about the house as you please. But I must warn you that your chateau is now in the occupation of the representatives of the German army and any attempt to escape from it or to signal to or otherwise communicate with the enemy will be followed by speedy and severe punishment. You may go.

(Corporal opens door on right; the ladies and priest are moving toward it when the large door at back is opened hurriedly and a German soldier enters).

SOLDIER *(saluting)*—Captain!

CAPTAIN—Well?

SOLDIER—Two Belgian soldiers have just been arrested. They were prowling about the back of the chateau as if trying to get into it.

CAPTAIN—Bring them in.

SOLDIER—Achtung! Vorwarts!

(The two prisoners enter under arrest. One is in the uniform of a Belgian lieutenant of cavalry; the other of a private. As the lieutenant enters, with a defiant air, the younger of the ladies utters an involuntary cry of recognition).

NADINE—Ah!

BARONESS *(laying hold of he hand)*—Hush!

CAPTAIN *(seeing this)*—H'm! *(To guard)*—Disarm them.

(The prisoners are disarmed of swords, revolvers, etc. While this is being done the German lieutenant points to picture on wall and then to the Belgian lieutenant. The captain nods, then steps forward).

CAPTAIN—So you are the Lieutenant Victor Lambotte?

BELGIAN LIEUTENANT—Perhaps I am.

CAPTAIN—This is your own house?

VICTOR—Perhaps it is.

CAPTAIN—And these two ladies are your mother and your wife?

VICTOR—Perhaps they are.

CAPTAIN—I understand. You think, with their rest of our enemies, that German soldiers are inhuman brutes, and hearing that your family chateau had fallen into the hands of their Imperial army, you came here to take your mother and wife away, lest they should become the victims of outrage and atrocity at the hands of German officers. That's it, isn't it?

VICTOR *(defiantly)*—If you think so, think so—you're welcome.

CAPTAIN—Remove the women and the priest.

(The ladies and priest are taken out right. Captain colloquies in table).

CAPTAIN—Your name and rank, sir?

VICTOR—You seem to know them already—why do you ask?

CAPTAIN *(imperatively)*—Your name and rank, sir?

VICTOR—Victor Lambotte, lieutenant.

CAPTAIN—Cavalry?

VICTOR—Can't you see?

CAPTAIN—Your regiment?

VICTOR *(suddenly)*—First of the line.

CAPTAIN—The squadron attached to headquarters?

VICTOR *(snapping it out)*—Yes.

CAPTAIN—Where are headquarters?

VICTOR—What's that to you?

COPORAL *(stepping forward)*—Ruhig!

CAPTAIN *(icating corporal back)*—I want to know where the Belgian headquarters are now.

VICTOR—Find out for yourself, then.

CAPTAIN *(with deadly calm)*—Thank you! That's precisely what I intend to do. *(To private)*—Your name?

BELGIAN PRIVATE *(who is visibly afraid)*—Private Jonniaux, sir.

CAPTAIN—Same regiment?

PRIVATE J.—Yes, the same regiment as the lieutenant, sir.

CAPTAIN—And the same squadron?

PRIVATE J.—Yes, number 124, first squadron, Sir.

CAPTAIN—At present stationed with the King at Fernes?

VICTOR *(in a low, warning voice)*—Jonniaux!

PRIVATE J. *(stammering)*—I—I think not, Captain.

CAPTAIN—Where then?

(Victor seizes Private Jonniaux's hand).

PRIVATE J.—I—I'm only a private. They don't tell a private everything. "Come here," they say, and he comes. "Go there," and he goes. And that's all he knows, sir.

CAPTAIN—Very well! If you won't answer that question, you won't. But there's another which you may be more ready to reply to. ou've just come through the Belgian outposts—isn't that so?

PRIVATE J. *(trembling)*—Yes, Captain.

CAPTAIN—And, of course, you expect to return through them?

PRIVATE J.—Yes, sir.

CAPTAIN—In that case you must have the password. What is it?

PRIVATE J.—But I don't know it. I give you my word of honor I don't. "Colonel's orders," said the sergeant, "you've to go with the lieutenant," and that's all they told me. Ask the lieutenant himself. *(To Victor)*—It's true, isn't it, sir?

VICTOR—Quite true. Private Jonniaux does not know the password. It was given to me **only.**

CAPTAIN—H'm! Then it's you who must give it up to us.

VICTOR *(firmly)*—I will not do so.

CAPTAIN—Victor! It is necessary, vitally necessary, to the welfare of the Imperial army that I should learn your password, so—

VICTOR—So you ask a Belgian soldier to cooperate with the enemy of Belgium? *(deliberately)* I'll not do it.

CAPTAIN—If you refuse you must take the consequences.

VICTOR—I'll *take* the consequences!

CAPTAIN *(after a pause)*—Perhaps you think you'll suffer at the hands of your own people. This is not so. You'll be confined, it's true, confined in your own house, with your wife, your mother and your fellow soldier, but you'll be protected—protected by the German army.

VICTOR—I want no protection from the German army. When my own army comes here, after they have scoured yours out of the country, they may find a prisoner, but not a traitor.

CAPTAIN—I want to treat you kindly, my man. Give me the password and I'll see to your safety.

VICTOR—Never in this world.

CAPTAIN—Not even to save your life?

VICTOR—Not even to save a hundred lives.

CAPTAIN—We'll see. Private Jonniaux?

PRIVATE J. *(trembling)*—Captain?

CAPTAIN—Are you married?

PRIVATE J.—Yes, three years married, sir.

CAPTAIN—Any children?

PRIVATE J. *(his look of fear giving way to a smile)*—Two—a boy and a girl, sir.

CAPTAIN—When did you see your children last?

PRIVATE J.—I've not seen the girl at all, sir. She's been born since I came to the war.

CAPTAIN—Then you've had no leave yet?

PRIVATE J.—Not yet, but I'm having four days next week, sir.

CAPTAIN—You are looking forward to them, I suppose?

PRIVATE J. *(his face beaming)*—You may well say that, Captain. I'm counting the hours and the minutes, sir.

CAPTAIN *(severely)*—Lieutenant Lambotte, if you do not give up the password then Private Jonniaux will be shot.

PRIVATE J. *(gasping)*—Captain!

VICTOR *(after a peal of derisive laughter)*—What a joke! Even German officers can't take a man's life in that unceremonious wyy, against all the regulations of military law.

CAPTAIN—I advise you not to count of what German officers cannot do—law or no law.

VICTOR *(fiercely)*—By God, you're right there, and all the world knows it.

CAPTAIN *(sternly)*—Well, I've told you what will happen—will you give me the password now?

VICTOR—No.

CAPTAIN—You want me to shoot your comrade?

VICTOR—You can't be inearnest. Private Jonniaux has done nothing. He knows nothing. Why should he be shot?

CAPTAIN—Why, indeed, when you can save him? If he is to die the responsibility will be yours—yours only.

VICTOR—But to threaten my comrade's life in order to put pressure on me—is it justice?

CAPTAIN—It's war.

VICTOR—Then shoot me if you must shoot somebody.

CAPTAIN—Why should I, snice you are the only one that knows the password?

VICTOR—And since I am the only one who knows it I am the only one who refuses to give it up. Must the innocent suffer for the guilty?

CAPTAIN—That's a question for *you* to answer. Come now. *I* don't want to shoot the Private Jonniaux. On the contrary, I want him to go home to his wife and children. *(Deliberately)* But I must have the password.

(Victor is silent for a moment, struggling hard. Jonniaux, who has been listening with looks of fear, now slides up to him).

JONNIAUX *(in a pleading tone)*—Lieutenant, you won't let them kill me, will you?

VICTOR *(in a whisper)*—Hold your tongue, Jonniaux.

JONNIAUX—I have done nothing, nothing at all. I only obeyed orders when I came here with you. Is a man to be shot for obeying orders?

VICTOR *(as before)*—But don't you see? They want to entray our King, our army.

JONNIAUX—My poor Louise! She'll be broken-hearted. She's in England now, and was coming to Folkestone to meet me *(fumbling in the breast of his tunic and bringing out papers)*. Look, here is her letter. This is a portrait of the baby I've never seen. And this is the boy. Only two years old, sir. Such a bright little fellow. We called him Albert *(pronounced Albaire)*, after the King.

VICTOR *(trying not to hear him)*—Don't speak to me. Don't! Don't

JONNIAUX—If you were father you would know what it means, sir. If you can save my life, and you will—won't you?

CAPTAIN—Once more, will you give me the password?

VICTOR *(after a great struggle)*—I can't! It's impossible! I should be a traitor.

CAPTAIN *(to corporal)*—Move the Private Jonniaux to the room below. Keep him there until further orders.

JONNIAUX—My God! They are going to shoot me!

CORPORAL *(to his guard)*—Achtung! Vorwarts!

(The guard lay hold of Private Jonniaux).

JONNIAUX *(shouting, they are dragging him away)*—You are killing me! Assassin! Murderer!! Curse you! Curse you!

VICTOR—Oh, God! Oh, God!

CAPTAIN *(after Private Jonniaux has been removed and his cries have ceased)*—Well? Brute as I am, do you think I wish such scenes? Quite the contrary. Come, give me the password and your comrade's life shall be saved even yet.

VICTOR—You are a soldier yourself—if our positions were reversed would *you* do such a thing?

CAPTAIN *(with a shrug)*—Perhaps not.

VICTOR *(flaming up)*—Then why do you ask me? Do you think Belgian soldiers are less loyal? Look! *(Pointing to one of the portraits on the walls)*—This is the portrait of my father. He died for his country—do you expect his son to betray it? That is the privaitt of the first King of the Belgians. He gave it to my grandfather for helping to found Belgium—do you want his grandson to help to destroy it? That *(pointing to the portrait over the Captain's head, drawing up and saluting)* is the portrait of my own King, Albert the Brave, the Immortal! He sacrificed his throne to save the honor of his kingdom—do you ask me to sacrifice my King and degrade the name of my country?

CAPTAIN—You have no country now, my man, and if you have a King he is a King without a kingdom.

VICTOR—Better a king without a kingdom than a Kaiser without a conscience.

SERGEANT AND GUARD *(shouting him down)*—Ruhig!

CAPTAIN *(with the same deadly calm)*—War is war and I must have that password.

VICTOR—Never from me, never!

CAPTAIN—We'll see. If I have failed perhaps somebody else will be successful. *(To sergeant)* Bring in the younger of the two ladies.

(Sergeant goes out by door on right).

VICTOR *(aghast)*—You can't mean that? To threaten a wife in order to force her husband—it's incredible, impossible! War is war, you say. Is this what you call war—war on women? *(Drawing himself up)*. But no matter! Belgian women can be brave. Haven't they proved that a thousand times already—*(taking off his cap)*—my brave countrywomen, God bless them! *(Throwing his cap away)*. Go on, then. Send for my wife. You'll see.

SERGEANT *(at door, right)*—Mme. Victor Lambotte.

CAPTAIN—Bring her in.

(Nadine enters with looks of fear. She goes up to Victor).

NADINE—Victor!

VICTOR *(laying hold of her hand)*—Courage, Nadine!

CAPTAIN—How long is it since you were married, Madame Lambotte?

VICTOR *(after a moment in which Nadine has stood silent and bewildered)*—Answer him. Don't be afraid.

NADINE—A little more than a year, sir.

CAPTAIN—Just before the beginning of the war?

NADINE—Only three days before, sir.

CAPTAIN—And how long is it since your husband left you to join their army?

NADINE—Exactly a year to-day, sir.

CAPTAIN—Then you were married during your honeymoon?

NADINE—Yes, he brought me back to his mother's house and then were away with the first regiment.

CAPTAIN—And how often have you seen him since?

NADINE—Only once until to-night, sir.

CAPTAIN—Naturally, it was a great grief to you to be separated so soon?

NADINE *(with emotion)*—Yes, sir.

VICTOR *(in a whisper)*—Be strong, don't break down.

CAPTAIN—And equally naturally you have been hoping and praying for the time when you can be together again in this charming chateau?

NADINE *(her eyes shining)*—I dream of it every night, sir.

CAPTAIN—Madame Lambotte, your dream may come to pass now if you can induce your husband to give u pone word to us.

NADINE—What word, sir?

CAPTAIN—His password.

(Victor is holding his breath and listening).

NADINE—But he can't do that, sir. No soldier ever can.

VICTOR *(relieved)*—Ah!

CAPTAIN—You must succeed in persuading him, madame, or else—— *(he hesitates).*

VICTOR *(breaking in hotly)*—Or else you'll be shot.

NADINE *(catching her breath)*—Shot?

VICTOR—Yes, shot, as Private Jonniaux is to be shot—because I refuse to be false to my King and country.

NADINE *(with a frightened cry)*—Victor!

VICTOR *(contemptuously to Captain)*—My wife won't do it—take that for your answer.

CAPTAIN—Let the lady answer for herself, please.

VICTOR—Let her—I'm willing.

CAPTAIN—Madame, I have no desire to injure you—none whatever. On the contrary, it won't be my fault if you cannot live here in your beautiful home with your brave young husband. But *(firmly)* I must have that password.

(Victor laughs bitterly, triumphantly. Nadine creeps up to him).

NADINE *(in a low, nervous voice)*—Victor, would it be so very wrong?

VICTOR—Nadine!

NADINE—After all, no harm may be done by it.

VICTOR—Harm! Don't you see? If they can get the password they can get through the Belgian lines. Then our army may be destroyed—our country wiped out—there may be no more Belgium.

NADINE—But the man who receives the password may never be able to use it. He may even be detected. A German is a German, a Belgian a Belgian—the Belgian soldiers at the outpost will not be deceived.

VICTOR—Hold your tongue, Nadine. You are breaking my heart.

NADINE *(beginning to cry)*—It's terrible! So young, too—and after all my dreams of love and happiness.

VICTOR—Say no more, Nadine.

NADINE—I'm only a weak little thing—not strong and brave like you, Victor.

VICTOR—Nadine! Nadine! You'll drive me mad.

NADINE—Surely you'll not see me die while a word from you can save me?

VICTOR *(in a loud voice, to Captain)*—Here—you are asking me to choose between my wife and my country, aren't you?

CAPTAIN *(with the same deadly calm)*—Choose, then.

VICTOR—But how can I? I can't! I would rather die at once. It must come to that in the end if I continue to refuse. So shoot me now and let's have done with it.

CAPTAIN—Not yet—not while the lady is alive to persuade you.

VICTOR—I won't listen to her. You've driven her crazy.

NADINE *(creeping closer, pleadingly, in a whisper)*—Victor, there's something you don't now... It's not *my* life only that is in question there's a child—an unborn child.

VICTOR—My God! My God!

NADINE—If they take my life, and yours after it, your old family will come to an end. You will be the last of your name—the last of your line—there will be no more Lambottes. Victor, for the sake of our love, our youth, our unborn babe, you'll save me, will you not?

.....*(Victor is silent for a moment, suffering visibly).*

CAPTAIN—Well, will you give the password now?

VICTOR *(after a great struggle)*—No, no, no! My family may end, my ancient name may be wiped out, my line may stop, but Liberty must go on and—Belgium!

CAPTAIN *(to thch guard)*—Remove the lady to theh room below.

NADINE *(throwing herself into Victor's arms in a frenzy of terror)*—No, no! Have mrecy on me, Victor! Victor! Victor! Save me! Save me!

(The guard lay her out of Victor's arms and drag her downstairs).

VICTOR *(covering his ears to shut out her cries)*—Oh, God! Oh, God!

CAPTAIN *(rising and crossing the room to Victor after the cries have died down beneath the stage)*—Why will you make me seem so hard and brutal? I give you every warning, offer you every alternative.

VICTOR—Are you obsessed, you, sir?

CAPTAIN—I have no wish to do all this. You compel me. Haven't I gone far enough? Will you force me to go further? Come now, give me the password and no harm shall some either to you or yours.

(Victor is struggling to control himself. The Captain comes closer).

Perhaps you are afraid of exposure. But your Belgian people will never know. We two can go into the next room. You can whisper theh password to me only. When we come back I can say you refused to giv eit up. So *nobody* will know.

VICTOR *(passionately, throwing up his head)*—Yes, *I* shall know, and God will know, and I shall be a traitor and a coward.

CAPTAIN *(to guard, returning to thch table)*—Bring in the old lady.

(The corporal goes out again by door on right).

VICTOR—God in Heaven, do you mean that? Brutes, barbarians! Do you call yourselves soldiers? Fight men, not women, sons, not mothers. I see what you're going to do, but you shall not do it. My mother is old. She can't bear the strain—she shan't.

CORPORAL—The Baroness Lambotte.

(The old lady enters with a firm step and a proud lok).

CAPTAIN *(rising)*—Baroness!

BARONESS *(calmly, to Captain)*—You sent fo me. What do you wish, sir?

CAPTAIN *(sitting)*—I wish you to use your influence with your son in a matter of the utmost importance.

BARONESS—What is it?

CAPTAIN—I have been asking him——

VICTOR *(breaking in)*—Stop that! My mother is weak after a great bereavement. You shall not torture her *(with towering look and uplifted hand)*. I forbid it!

BARONESS—Be silent, my son. Let me hear what the officer has to say. I'm not afraid. I've suffered too much to be afraid of anything now. *(Victor controls himself. The Baroness turns back to the Captain).* Well, sir?

CAPTAIN—I've been asking the lieutenant to give me the password to the Belgian lines——

BARONESS—The password to the Belgian lines?

CAPTAIN *(bowing)*—If he is willing to do so I promise to protect him and his family for so long as the Imperial army hold possession of this country——

BARONESS—And if he is not willing, you will take his life—is that it?

CAPTAIN—No, not *his* life, madame.

BARONESS—Who's then?

CAPTAIN—Yours.

BARONESS *(drawing herself up proudly)*—Then he shall *not* give you the password. I am only an old woman, but I am the daughter of a soldier, the widow of a soldier and the mother of a soldier. My son shall not degrade the honor of a soldier to save his mother's life.

VICTOR *(with a triumphant shout)*—Do you hear that? Didn't I tell you thatn Belgin women could be brace. *(Hold out his arm).* Mothers!

BARONESS *(embracing him)*—Victor!

CAPTAIN *(to his guard)*—Remove her.

(The guard approach the old lady as if to lay hold of her).

BARONESS—Stand back, sirs! Have you German soldiers no mothers in your German homes? *(The Captain waves to the guard; they fall back. The Baroness kisses Victor).* Be strong, my son. Do your duty as a soldier without thinking of me. *(She turns up stage, glances at the picture of her husband, stops).* Remember your father, my Victor. He is looking down on you. Adieu!

(The Captain and his Lieutenant rise, and all the German soldiers stand at salute as the Baroness, with a firm, proud step, crosses stage and goes down the stairs.)

VICTOR—And now that you've done your damnedest, let's put an end to this business. What is it to be?

CAPTAIN *(coming from back of table)*—Wait! *(To his Lieutenant)*: Lieutenant Harnack—a despatch.

LIEUTENANT *(preparing to write)*—I'm ready, sir.

CAPTAIN *(in front of table, dictating)*—"To General von Hindenberg—Two Belgian soldiers captured here. Lieutenant Victor Lambotte and Private Jonniaux, have been guilty of treachery in war; and two non-combatants, the Baroness Lambotte and Madame Victor Lambotte, mother and wife of the first-named prisoner, have aided and abetted them in conduct which impedes the progress and imperils the safety of the Imperial army. For these offenses I condemn all four to death, and hereby ask for official confirmation of my sentence and authority to carry it into immediate execution."

LIEUTENANT— . . . "Immediate execution."

(The Captain takes up despatch and comes down to Victor.)

CAPTAIN—You have heard the terms of my despatch?

VICTOR *(defiantly)*—I have.

CAPTAIN—Well, brute and barbarian as you think I am, I have no desire to send it to my general. If I do so it will only be because you have left me no choice. I wish to save your life, and with it the lives of your mother, your wife and your comrade in arms. But I must have the password—I must have it now—before midnight. Will you give it up?

VICTOR—Never!

CAPTAIN—You are a brave man, and as such I honor you. You believe you are doing [illegible] Well, I am doing my duty. Listen! Perhaps you'll see that I'm not acting by an impulse of brutality. I came here to night on my way to the Belgian lines. Our General had heard from his flying corps that important new movements were being made to-day at enemy headquarters, such as might before morning imperil the safety of the German army. He sent me to find out what those movements were. If I *don't* find out, and any disaster befalls our forces, I shall be degraded, perhaps shot. It is therefore life or death to me also. That's our system—our military system. Chance has given me possession of this Chatean. Chance has brought you back to your old home. For the safety of the army of my country, as well as for my own safety, I must get through the Belgian lines and learn what is going on there. Once more, and for the last time, will you give me the password?

VICTOR—No, no; now more than ever, no!

CAPTAIN—Very well, if it must be, it must. *(Captain steps back to table, signs despatch.)* Sergeant!

SERGEANT *(giving despatch)*—Take this to General Headquarters and wait for an answer. Lose no time. Ride your fastest horse and get back quickly.

SERGEANT—Yes, sir.

(He goes up. Corporal throws open central door, showing dark night outside. Sergeant stops.)

SERGEANT—Captain, the pickets report that Belgian snipers are hiding in the grounds of the Chateau. To make sure that this despatch reaches the General commanding, others should go with me.

CAPTAIN—Take everybody except the guard at the gate.

SERGEANT—Everybody?

CAPTAIN—Don't be afraid. The Lieutenant and I can look after ourselves.

(The Sergeant salutes and goes out, followed by the Corporal and inside guard. They pull the door after them. There is a moment of silence, then the sound of horses' hoofs galloping away. Victor is listening and thinking intensely.)

CAPTAIN—The Sergeant will be back within a quarter of an hour. You have some minutes yet. I warn you to make good use of them.

(A light is seen to break on Victor's face.)

VICTOR *(assuming a softer tone)*—Captain, if, as you say, you have sentenced me to death, will you not show a dying man one mercy?

CAPTAIN—What is it?

VICTOR—A priest. I wish to make my confession.

CAPTAIN *(to Lieutenant)*—Call the Cure.

(Lieutenant goes in by door right. Captain crosses to table. Silence for a moment. Lieutenant and Old Priest re enter.)

CAPTAIN—Reverend Father, the Lieutenant Lambotte has been condemned to death.

FATHER L. *(in horror)*—To death?

CAPTAIN—Yes, sir. I am about to give you a safe conduct and see that you are all four passed through the German lines and across the Dutch frontier. No harm of any kind shall come to you. You shall be protected from the reproaches of your people. More than that, your nationality shall be concealed even from my people. No one shall question you. It shall seem that you are all German.

(Victor listens and at the same time glances furtively at the bell above the clock at R. The sound of weeping comes from below stage.)

Listen! That's your wife. She thinks you are killing her. You are. If the sergeant returns before you give me the password it will be impossible to save any of you. No power on earth can save you then. Quick—decide. Save yourself and all that belong to you. It's your last chance.

(Victor, who is seen to be marking time, pretends to consent.)

VICTOR—But how—how can I do what you say?

CAPTAIN—Change uniforms with my lieutenant. Then, in the uniform of a German soldier, you, your comrade, your wife and your mother shall be conveyed through the imperial lines.

VICTOR *(who is still watching the bell over the clock)*—Very well, let us change uniforms, then.

CAPTAIN *(to his own lieutenant)*—Lieutenant Harnack, give Lieutenant Lambotte your overcoat and tunic, and put on his instead.

(Lieutenant Harnack steps down to Victor's side—the chair on which the priest has sat being between them. They take off their military overcoats, then their tunics. Victor is seen to be doing so slowly, glancing from time to time at the bell above the clock, and listening for a sound from without. The priest is still standing with his forehead against the wall at back. The German captain is on left of the two lieutenants.)

CAPTAIN—Quick! Lose no time. The sergeant may return at any moment now.

(Victor, having stripped off his overcoat and tunic, stands with the German tunic in his hands. He is listening intently. There is a moment of dead silence. Then comes the tramp of horses in the distance, galloping toward the house.)

CAPTAIN—Listen! The sergeant is coming back.

(The sound of the galloping becomes louder. Victor is looking steadfastly at the bell above the clock.)

CAPTAIN—My people are here with my general's order. The password—quick, before it is too late.

(The hour when the clock rings loudly. Victor flings down the German uniform and tramples it under his feet.)

VICTOR *(with a triumphant shout)*—No, but my people and my King.

VOICE *(outside, calling)*—"The Call of the King."

FATHER L. *(flinging the door open, in a loud voice)*—"The Call of the King."

(Four Belgian officers enter. The German captain and his lieutenant throw up their hands. At the next moment the King of the Belgians enters. His officers salute.)

VICTOR *(falling himself at the King's feet, and crying in a joyful voice that is, at the same time, full of sobs)*—My King! My King!

(As the curtain falls the people from the room below come running up the stairs: The Baroness Lambotte, Madame Victor Lambotte, Private Jonniaux and the servants of the chateau.)

CURTAIN.

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